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Advancement of women

Improvement of the situation of women in rural areas

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report responds to General Assembly resolution 60/138. It reviews the activities undertaken by Member States and United Nations entities to improve the situation of women in rural areas, including by addressing the empowerment of rural women. Recommendations for consideration by the Assembly are provided.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 60/138, on the improvement of the situation of women in rural areas, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of the resolution, addressing different aspects of the empowerment of rural women. In response to that resolution, the present report summarizes actions taken by Member States[1] and United Nations entities[2] to improve the situation of rural women and support their empowerment. Recommendations for consideration by the Assembly are provided.

II. Background

2. According to International Labour Organization (ILO) data,[3] in 2006 40.4 per cent of the total number of employed women worked in agriculture. Women agricultural workers are responsible for half of the world's food production and are the main producers of staple crops, which account for 60 to 80 per cent of the food intake in developing countries. Rural women also generate non-agricultural income. They often work long hours in difficult circumstances, combining agricultural work and reproductive work in the household, including caring for children, the elderly and the sick. Women in many rural areas are responsible for fuel and water collection, often without adequate technologies.

3. The lack of infrastructure in many areas, including roads, water and sanitation systems and energy sources, increases women's work and time burdens.[4] Education for women and girls in rural areas remains a problem. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reports that 77 million children of primary-school age are not enrolled in school, of whom 57 per cent are girls.[5] In sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, over 80 per cent of the out-of-school children live in rural areas.

4. Rural women in many areas do not participate in decision-making processes, and their rights and needs are often neglected. In many countries, the situation of women living in rural areas continues to deteriorate because of the lack of development, migration to towns, the ageing of the population and the lack of

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[1] Algeria, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, China, Colombia, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iraq, Japan, Lebanon, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Portugal, Russian Federation, Senegal, Tajikistan, Thailand, Ukraine, Viet Nam and Yemen.

[2] The Economic Commission for Europe, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, ILO, the International Maritime Organization, the International Trade Centre UNCTAD/WTO, the United Nations Development Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the United Nations Office at Geneva, the World Intellectual Property Organization, the World Meteorological Organization, the World Bank, the World Tourism Organization and the International Organization for Migration responded to the request for inputs for the preparation of the report.

[3] *Global Employment Trends for Women*, ILO, March 2007.

[4] World Bank Working Paper No. 73, chap. II, "Gender and time poverty in sub-Saharan Africa", by Aslihan Kes and Hema Swaminathan, 2006.

[5] *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2007: Strong Foundations*, UNESCO, 2006.

education and training opportunities. Rural women are often among the poorest and most vulnerable.

A. International conventions

5. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women continued to play a critical role in systematically addressing the situation of rural women. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women specifically addresses the situation of rural women in article 14. A review of 66 concluding comments adopted by the Committee during its twenty-ninth to thirty-seventh sessions, from July 2003 to January 2007, indicated that the expert body consistently enquired into the situation of rural women, covering a large number of issues in all geographic regions.

6. In its dialogues with States parties, the Committee called for the systematic integration of rural women's issues in national policies and programmes on, inter alia, nutrition, water and sanitation, health-care services, education, vocational training and income-generation opportunities. The Committee highlighted rural women's access to land, credit, financial resources and new technologies as critical to poverty alleviation. The Committee repeatedly called for the further improvement of the availability of health-care information and services, including in the area of sexual and reproductive health.

7. Concern was expressed about the limited availability in rural areas of means of redress and protection, including protection orders, and support services for victims of violence such as legal aid, shelters and medical assistance. The Committee identified the improvement of women's social and economic situation in rural areas as an important strategy in eliminating their vulnerability to traffickers. It called for services to be put in place for the rehabilitation and reintegration of victims of trafficking.

8. Discrimination against women with respect to ownership and inheritance of land was identified as a major obstacle to rural women's economic empowerment. The importance of access to and control over land and credit facilities and access to training opportunities was highlighted. The Committee also identified deeply entrenched prejudices and stereotypes as major obstacles to rural women's ability to enjoy their human rights in equality with men. The Committee also called for the full participation of rural women in the formulation and implementation of all sectoral policies and programmes.

9. At its sixty-first session the General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,[6] which defines the rights of persons with disabilities and sets out a plan of implementation. The Convention specifically calls on States parties to ensure the equal rights and advancement of women and girls with disabilities (article 6) and makes several references to the rights of people living in rural areas (articles 9 and 26). The right to the highest attainable standard of health without discrimination on the basis of disability includes access for persons with disabilities to gender-sensitive health services close to people's own communities, including in rural areas (article 25). The adoption of the Convention

[6] Resolution 61/106.

provides a new opportunity for systematically monitoring the situation of women with disabilities in rural areas.

B. Intergovernmental processes

10. In its resolution 60/138, the General Assembly invited the Commission on the Status of Women to continue to pay attention to the situation of rural women in the consideration of its priority themes. The Commission addressed the situation of rural women as a cross-cutting area of concern. In its agreed conclusions entitled "Enhanced participation of women in development: an enabling environment for achieving gender equality and the advancement of women, taking into account, inter alia, the fields of education, health and work", adopted at its fiftieth session, in 2006, the Commission called for the review and implementation of policies to support national efforts to ensure that a higher proportion of resources reached women, in particular in rural and remote areas.[7]

11. At its fifty-first session, in 2007, the Commission considered the theme "The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child". The Commission called for efforts to ensure gender equality in enrolment and completion of schooling at the early childhood, primary and all other educational levels for all girls, especially in neglected and marginalized areas and communities and rural and remote areas. Financial incentives, stipends and nutrition programmes were also called for to improve enrolment and retention rates for girls at all educational levels. The Commission also raised the need for the promotion of policies and measures to empower young women economically, especially in rural and remote areas. The increased access of girls to information and communications technology (ICT), particularly girls living in poverty, in rural and remote areas and in disadvantaged situations, was highlighted.[8]

12. Since the General Assembly adopted resolution 60/138, other intergovernmental processes and outcomes have also specifically addressed the situation of rural women. The Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, adopted at the World Summit on the Information Society (2005),[9] reaffirmed the commitment to building ICT capacity and confidence in the use of ICT for all, including, inter alia, women, indigenous peoples and remote and rural communities.

13. At the 2005 World Summit, Heads of State and Government made a commitment to promote gender equality and eliminate pervasive gender discrimination, including by guaranteeing the right of women to own and inherit property and ensuring equal access for women to productive assets and resources, including land, credit and technology.[10]

14. In recognition of the link between poverty eradication and productive employment, the Economic and Social Council, at its high-level segment in 2006, focused on creating an environment conducive to generating full and productive

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[7] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2006, Supplement No. 7* and corrigendum (E/2006/27 and Corr.1).

[8] Ibid., *2007, Supplement No. 7* (E/2007/27).

[9] See A/60/687.

[10] See resolution 60/1, para. 58.

employment and decent work for all. In his report to the Council,[11] the Secretary-General noted that both decent employment creation and productivity growth in on- and off-farm activities were strategies for poverty reduction in rural areas. Women, in particular, needed secure rights to land, training and technology. The importance of women's self-help groups and producer groups in overcoming credit and market constraints was recognized.

III. National-level action by Member States and United Nations entities to improve the situation of women in rural areas and support their empowerment

15. In its resolution 60/138, the General Assembly invited Member States, in collaboration with the organizations of the United Nations and civil society, as appropriate, to attach greater importance to the improvement of the situation of rural women, including indigenous women, in their national, regional and global development strategies. In response to resolution 60/138, Member States and the United Nations system have taken a number of actions towards empowering rural women, improving their situation and ensuring attention to their priorities, needs and contributions. Sections A to G below highlight actions taken, pursuant to the resolution, to create an enabling environment for improving the situation of rural women and ensuring attention to their needs and contributions; integrate a gender perspective into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development policies and programmes; support rural women's full and equal participation in decision-making at all levels; invest in and strengthen efforts to meet the basic needs of rural women; support the remunerative non-agricultural employment of rural women; ensure that rural women are accorded full and equal rights to own land and other property, including through the right to inheritance; and provide access to and use of ICT.

A. Creating an enabling environment for improving the situation of rural women

16. In its resolution 60/138 the General Assembly called for the creation of an enabling environment for improving the situation of rural women and ensuring attention to their needs and contributions. Initiatives undertaken by Member States and United Nations entities included increasing attention to rural women in gender equality policies and strategies; developing specific policies and strategies on rural women; promoting legislative change; carrying out targeted activities for rural women; increasing the visibility of their situations and improving gender statistics.

17. Several countries included a stronger focus on rural women in their national strategies on gender equality. The national programme on gender equality of Mongolia, which is currently in its second implementation phase, included a focus on rural development with a special emphasis on women's socio-economic situation. Ukraine established a State programme on gender equality through 2010, aimed at decreasing gender stereotypes in rural areas. The Government of Tajikistan adopted its guidelines for a State policy to ensure equal rights and equal opportunities for

[11] E/2006/55.

men and women of Tajikistan for the period 2001-2010, which addressed the specific needs of rural women, including in the context of land reform.

18. In some countries specific strategies on rural women or gender equality strategies for rural development or agriculture were developed. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Viet Nam adopted a gender strategy and plan of action on agriculture and rural development through 2010, with the goal of coordinating and promoting efforts of agencies, mass organizations and individuals to realize gender equality in agriculture and in rural development. Ecuador plans to develop a national policy on rural women. Yemen set up a general department for the development of rural women within the Ministry of Agriculture and established rural women's departments at the governorate level, which were responsible for running projects targeted at rural women. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) provided support to Governments in developing national and local development strategies and plans for improving the livelihood of rural women in Djibouti, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Uganda, within the Millennium Development Goals framework.

19. Several countries contributed to establishing an enabling environment by giving attention to the legislative change required to improve the situation of rural women. Viet Nam integrated the concerns of rural women in a number of laws aimed at improving their standard of living. The Gender Equality Law of 2006 facilitated gender equality activities in remote and mountainous areas, in areas of extremely difficult socio-economic conditions and among ethnic minority groups. The national machinery for gender equality and the Ministry of Agriculture of Colombia cooperated in the implementation of the legal framework to support rural women, including through the provision of targeted funds for capacity-building on project management and entrepreneurship for rural women.

20. Targeted activities for rural women were also supported by a number of countries. In Mexico, the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples established programmes and provided financial support for indigenous women and their organizations. In its development assistance, Monaco supported rural women in Africa through income-generating projects, women's cooperatives, literacy education and training in business practices. The Ministry of Agriculture of Iraq has developed a set of project proposals on women in rural areas (2007), with the goal of enhancing their livelihoods through the improved use of home gardens, the raising of poultry and carpet production.

21. Other efforts were made to increase the visibility of and attention to the role of rural women. Belgium, for example, continued to provide support to the Dimitra project "Rural women and development: networking and partnerships", implemented by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in Africa and the Middle East. The project links over 1,500 organizations and provides information on projects concerning rural women, food security and sustainable development. It enhances attention to the role of rural women in rural development, using both traditional and new communication and information technologies, promotes information exchange between development actors, and disseminates information on the work of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations on rural women.

22. In response to the increasing demand for accurate and relevant gender statistics to facilitate gender-sensitive planning of agricultural and rural

development policies and programmes, FAO assisted national statistical institutions in Burkina Faso, Chile, Hungary, Malaysia, Namibia, Togo, Viet Nam and Zambia to disaggregate existing data sets by sex. Technical support was given to over 20 countries in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America to mainstream a gender perspective in their agricultural censuses.

B. Integrating a gender perspective into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development policies and programmes

23. In its resolution 60/138 the General Assembly called for the integration of a gender perspective into the design, implementation and evaluation of development policies and programmes, including budget policies, paying increased attention to the needs of rural women so as to ensure that they benefit from policies and programmes adopted in all spheres and that the disproportionate number of rural women living in poverty is reduced. Member States used a variety of measures to incorporate attention to rural women in policies, legislation, strategies, programmes and resource allocation.

24. Attention to rural women was incorporated into rural development plans and programmes in a number of countries. The programme for rural development through 2010 in the Russian Federation (2006), for example, included measures that benefit women in rural areas, such as increasing the number of schools and pre-school institutions and improving access to health care. The Government of Belarus developed a programme for the revitalization and improvement of rural livelihoods (2005-2010), aimed at creating favourable social and economic conditions in rural areas, including job opportunities for young women. Within the context of its national agricultural and rural development plan and anti-poverty actions, Algeria targets rural women, and in particular households headed by women.

25. Within the European Union, the mainstreaming of equal opportunities is an integral element of the Community Support Framework and a general objective for all operational programmes. Applicants to the Agricultural and Rural Development Operational Programme for 2004-2006 received extra points in the scoring system if they included the improvement of the working conditions of women in their business plan.

26. Initiatives taken included the incorporation of gender perspectives into existing mechanisms to ensure attention to, and positive impact on, the situation of rural women. A network for social protection in Colombia (2006), set up to address extreme poverty, integrated a gender perspective in the design and implementation of its programmes to support rural women.

27. A number of initiatives were also reported on gender mainstreaming in the area of development cooperation. Finland supported long-term rural development programmes that promote and support gender equality in Ethiopia, Nepal, Nicaragua and Viet Nam. Gender equality was a cross-cutting theme in all interventions.

28. Innovative work was reported on gender-sensitive budgeting. Egypt's national economic and social plan (2002-2007) included attention to the gender mainstreaming strategy, including gender-sensitive budgeting. As a result, allocations for women-specific programmes doubled. In addition, a number of pilot projects were conducted in rural areas for the social, economic and political

empowerment of women, combining literacy and microcredit programmes. In Kosovo the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) supported gender-responsive budgeting initiatives by involving key partners in ministries, local municipalities and women's organizations. In one municipality, the gender-sensitive budgeting report, focused on rural women, led to the allocation of resources to establish greenhouses in 12 villages and a collection point for women's produce to facilitate access to markets. UNDP provided capacity-building in a number of countries on gender-sensitive budgeting to ensure better targeting of resource allocations, improved outcomes and mainstreaming of gender considerations into national and state-level policy frameworks.

C. Promoting the participation of rural women in decision-making

29. The General Assembly, in its resolution 60/138, recognized that the empowerment of rural women required their full and equal participation in decision-making at all levels, including through affirmative action and support for women's organizations, trade unions, civil society groups and other associations promoting rural women's rights. A number of measures to empower rural women through participation in political decision-making were reported. Although the involvement of rural women in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development policies and programmes has been recognized as an important means of improving their situation, little information was provided on efforts in this regard. Similarly, very little information was available on the impact of efforts to improve women's participation in different areas, although UNDP reported that the monitoring of the implementation of projects by locally elected women in India led to better delivery of basic services in rural areas.

30. Member States supported the political participation of women at the local level. In China the Ministry of Civil Affairs stipulated that women should be represented in village committees. Women's participation in local elections was supported in Thailand. The participation of women in rural areas in Japan was supported by the adoption in 2005 of the Basic Law on Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas and by guidance provided on targets for women's participation, including as board members of agricultural cooperatives. In Bangladesh, the Government legislated that three seats were to be reserved for women in each Union Parishad (local council). To further strengthen the role of locally elected women, the number of Union Parishad Project Implementation Committees was increased so that women could chair one quarter of them.

31. Targets of 50 per cent representation by women in decision-making structures in management and leadership committees, including in rural and camp settings and return areas, were also set by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). An indicator scorecard based on 2005 data illustrated that about half of all UNHCR camps met or nearly met this standard. UNHCR found that the 50 per cent representation of women was easier to achieve in distribution committees in refugee camps than in camp management committees that negotiate on refugee protection issues. Cultural stereotypes and practices on expected gender roles often limited women's actual participation in camp committees.

32. Training was an important strategy adopted to support women's participation. Training manuals were developed in China for rural women interested in running for

local elections. Thailand's Office of Women's Affairs and Family Development plans to hold workshops to train women candidates for the 2007 local elections.

33. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) trained women scientists and policymakers in land degradation assessment and environmental accounting methods to improve the design, implementation and monitoring of polices and programmes. The UNEP project on capacity-building through partnership and ICT for using indigenous knowledge for nature conservation and natural disaster management in Africa sought to enhance the participation of rural women in work on indigenous knowledge. Project studies in Kenya, Swaziland and the United Republic of Tanzania highlighted the role of rural women in their communities as the main custodians of indigenous knowledge critical for poverty alleviation.

D. Providing for the basic needs of rural women

34. In its resolution 60/138 the General Assembly called on Member States and United Nations entities to invest in and strengthen efforts to meet basic needs. A broad range of actions were undertaken by Member States, including social support measures to lower the risk of poverty for rural women; improvement to infrastructure such as water supplies and transport systems; increased access to education and training; and efforts to combat HIV/AIDS and prevent the trafficking of women.

35. Efforts were undertaken in some countries to improve the social security systems, as women working on family farms do not benefit from public insurance schemes. In Lebanon women working in agriculture have access to social benefits only if they have permanent contracts or work for export-oriented companies; health insurance is optional for family enterprises. The Government is developing a social action plan to reduce poverty by strengthening the social security system. Greece will pass legislation promoting obligatory insurance for both spouses working in an agricultural family enterprise. On the basis of the findings of three ILO case studies, the National Registry of Workers and Employers in Argentina will register rural women as workers with entitlements to social benefits. In Bangladesh government allowances for the Widows and Destitute Women Programme were increased for 2006-2007.

36. Older women and widows in villages in Hungary risk living below the poverty line because their pensions are small or because they receive only survivor's pensions. To address this situation, the Government increased the survivor's pension in 2006 and 2007. Belize introduced a non-contributory pension for women aged 65 and older, which has assisted poor rural women.

37. Improvements in rural infrastructure to benefit rural women were reported. The Government of Viet Nam worked to improve the electricity grid, roads and water. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) assisted in the development of rural energy systems and biofuel production, which benefited women through their labour-saving impact, the creation of employment and the provision of income-generating opportunities. The World Bank/Inter-American Development Bank road improvement programme in Peru led to improved transport systems, including 3,000 kilometres of pedestrian tracks heavily used by women.

This reduced travel times by up to half and improved access to education, health services and markets.

38. Viet Nam also reported progress in providing rural women with increased access to health care. Almost all villages and wards were reported to have public health units with medical staff and basic equipment. In line with the national strategy for reproductive health care, 2001-2010, almost all provinces had reproductive health centres

39. Measures to address the educational needs of rural women included abolishing tuition and textbook fees for students of poor families to facilitate compulsory education in rural regions in China. Almost 100,000 rural women's schools were opened to provide training and income-generation activities. Local authorities in Algeria set up specialized units in rural areas to promote vocational training for girls and women. These efforts are complemented by literacy programmes run by local organizations that also provide information on health and reproductive issues and income-generating activities. Girls and women in difficult circumstances, particularly in remote and rural areas, received special attention in UNESCO education programmes. UNESCO supported the efforts of Member States to increase girls' access to, and their retention in, primary education and their transition to secondary education, in fulfilment of the Education for All goals and the Millennium Development Goals. Belarus increased rural women's access to educational institutions specialized in rural development and agriculture.

40. Several initiatives were undertaken to provide relevant training for rural women. The Federal Ministry of Agrarian Reform of Mexico provided, through its women's programme, support to capacity-building and training for rural women in the area of entrepreneurship. Women in rural areas in Viet Nam were provided with training in business skills related to agriculture, forestry and fishery production. Senegal included capacity-building activities in its programme on microfinance for women in rural areas. The Ministry of Agriculture of Iraq is planning to train women engineers and extension workers on its staff in order to better respond to the needs of women in rural areas.

41. In Viet Nam and Cambodia, ILO contributed to national efforts to increase the socio-economic status of rural women by providing training on gender equality issues, women workers' rights, life skills, small business management skills and vocational skills, as well as by establishing self-help groups. Gender equality training was also provided to the husbands of women beneficiaries, local officials and leaders. As a result of these interventions, income levels increased and women's participation in decision-making in their families and communities was strengthened. Assumptions about women's and men's public and private roles among women, their husbands and local institutions were also changed.

42. Significant efforts were made to combat HIV/AIDS among women in rural areas. The Women's Department of the Ministry of Human Development of Belize conducted workshops in rural areas to strengthen the country's multisectoral response to HIV/AIDS. The Government identified the need to change attitudes as one of the greatest challenges in HIV/AIDS prevention. Mexico provided rapid HIV testing for pregnant women in rural areas who had no access to health facilities and provided anti-retroviral treatment to women who lacked social security coverage.

43. Recognizing that gender inequalities are a driving force of the epidemic, FAO developed agricultural sector strategies with a focus on HIV/AIDS and gender issues in the United Republic of Tanzania and Zimbabwe. Together with the World Food Programme (WFP), FAO set up Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools in Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia and Zambia for children orphaned by HIV/AIDS and other vulnerable youths, to improve their agricultural knowledge and skills. Adult Farmer Field and Life Schools targeted poor households affected by HIV/AIDS, with a special emphasis on households headed by women.

44. The vulnerability of women and girls in rural areas to trafficking because of the lack of economic opportunity and poor social conditions was addressed by several United Nations entities. Measures were taken to inform women on the risks of trafficking through awareness-raising campaigns about legal migration channels. In the Upper Mekong region, for example, UNESCO contributed to the production and broadcasting of soap operas on the local radio in minority languages to provide information about the dangers of trafficking.

45. Efforts were also undertaken to provide assistance to victims of trafficking. Since 2006 the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in close cooperation with the Government of Afghanistan, has assisted victims of trafficking, most of them women from rural areas. The victims are provided with food, shelter and medical and legal assistance, as well as family reunification assistance. The IOM information campaign has reached out to the general public through the use of radio spots and information tools such as posters. IOM has proactively engaged female officials of the Ministry of Interior in the investigation and prosecution of trafficking cases.

46. The World Tourism Organization established the Task Force to Protect Children from Sexual Exploitation in Tourism, which brings together key players from government, the tourism industry, international organizations, NGOs and media associations. While the aim of the Task Force is to prevent the sexual exploitation of children in tourism, in March 2007, its scope was broadened to include the protection of children and young women against any form of exploitation in tourism.

47. Women of concern to UNHCR in rural areas live primarily in camps or settlements managed by national authorities. UNHCR promotes the well-being of these women through the provision of food and non-food items, health care, water and sanitation; training on income generation; awareness-raising on their rights; and education on how to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS. Women receive individual documentation that gives them the freedom to move and be involved in economic activities and skill development activities.

E. Supporting the non-agricultural employment of rural women

48. In its resolution 60/138 the General Assembly called for support for the remunerative non-agricultural employment of rural women, improved working conditions and increased access to productive resources. Member States and United Nations entities recognized the need to expand women's employment opportunities through the development of small enterprises and the strengthening of women's access to finance, technology and training. A combination of developing new skills, supporting cooperative arrangements, building on existing skills, such as traditional

handicrafts, and expanding into new sectors such as tourism, as well as the provision of funding, widened women's access to non-agricultural employment opportunities.

49. Multidimensional strategies addressed the employment needs of rural women. Viet Nam reported on actions taken to improve skills, create more jobs and encourage rural women's participation in household services, micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, including projects in agriculture, aquaculture, forestry and "one village, one product" projects. Measures undertaken included establishing skills development programmes for women labourers, restoring and developing traditional handicraft villages and developing industries for agricultural and forestry products, services and tourism in rural areas.

50. A number of specific targeted measures were taken to encourage rural women's participation in the workforce. The Social Welfare Services in Cyprus provided grants to NGOs to support services for pre-school and school-age children, persons with disabilities and older persons in both rural and urban areas to facilitate women's employment opportunities. The grants distributed for programmes in rural areas were slightly higher than in urban areas. A joint World Bank/Inter-American Development Bank programme in Peru set targets for the involvement of rural women in its road improvement programme — women had to make up 20 per cent of the members of road committees and 10 per cent of the members of road maintenance microenterprises.

51. In recognition of the linkage between poverty and gender inequality, the Government of Bangladesh supported women's income-generating activities through training, technical and non-formal education and access to credit. To address the population decline in rural areas caused by lack of employment, the national population policy of Croatia supported alternative forms of employment, including support for female entrepreneurs.

52. Significant efforts were made to provide training, capacity-building and skills development for rural women. Portugal provided professional training and access to new technologies for women. Since women account for 25 to 30 per cent of all small-scale entrepreneurs, mostly in the agricultural sector, the Russian Federation provided training to upgrade the skills of unemployed women. The Czech Republic's national action plan for the creation of equal opportunities for women and men included retraining programmes to increase employment options. More than 23,000 people were trained at vocational training centres in Mongolia in 2005 and 2006, 65 per cent of whom were women. An ILO/UNHCR partnership supported women's socio-economic empowerment through capacity-building for refugees and returnees on entrepreneurship culture and microcredit. The provision of funds for follow-up in Angola and Mozambique, in the form of establishment of business plans, increased the effectiveness of the training.

53. UNDP undertook interventions aimed at eliminating illiteracy, upgrading social skills and providing vocational training to assist women in gaining access to sustainable jobs in the Syrian Arab Republic. In Uzbekistan, access to microcredit in combination with capacity-building helped 6,250 rural women to start their own businesses and achieve improved socio-economic status in society. The IFAD Rural Enterprises Project organized training programmes in income-generating activities and small business management skills. Through these programmes, unemployed and underemployed people, mainly women, gained skills in various areas, including

leatherwork, bead-making, soap production, carpentry, hairdressing, dressmaking, and batik tie-dye. The World Intellectual Property Organization developed projects in Africa, Asia and Latin America that built capacity among indigenous and rural women to address intellectual property rights in handicrafts and traditional creative arts and enabled them to protect, promote and market their products more effectively.

54. The establishment of women's cooperatives and self-help groups was another strategy to increase the participation of women in non agricultural employment. In Myanmar, the Human Development Initiative microfinance project promoted the creation of self-reliance groups as a key strategy for poverty alleviation in over 3,475 village groups. The initiative addressed activities related to HIV/AIDS, water and sanitation, education and illiteracy. More than 250,000 women participated. The 111 women's agro-tourist cooperatives established in Greece to facilitate women's access to the labour market illustrated the potential of rural women, although the cooperatives faced problems in marketing their products and services. As a result of targeted outreach, rural women represented a high percentage of beneficiaries in the work of the International Trade Centre (ITC) to assist small businesses in Brazil, Cambodia, Kenya, Mongolia, Sierra Leone and South Africa. These projects created new employment opportunities for women and raised their incomes. The establishment of women-headed cooperatives supported women's participation in export development at all levels.

F. Increasing rural women's right to land, property and inheritance

55. In its resolution 60/138 the General Assembly called for designing and revising laws to ensure that, where private ownership of land and property exists, rural women receive full and equal rights to own land and property. Access to land defines women's economic status in rural areas within and outside the household. Land is a productive, livelihood-sustaining asset as well as a condition for women's access to credit. In countries where women face no legal obstacles to obtaining land they often lack financial resources to purchase land of good quality. Member States and entities of the United Nations system undertook legislative measures, developed guidelines, carried out research and implemented specific projects to address these constraints.

56. Legislative measures to secure women's access to land included the revision of the Land Law in Viet Nam in July 2004, which required all land-use certificates to bear the names of both husbands and wives. The law protected women's rights to private property and property inheritance on an equal basis with those of men. At the request of households, authorities at the local level exchanged old certificates for new ones. Awareness-raising activities targeted all title holders, including women, who often remained unaware of their rights to property and inheritance. Greece abolished discriminatory provisions in the law governing the registration of farms and agricultural enterprises. While in the past married male farmers could sell land independently, the sale of land now required the consent of both spouses.

57. Research initiatives included a two-year research partnership between IFAD and the Sustainable Development Policy Institute and ActionAid in Pakistan, aimed at examining the causality behind women's landlessness, poverty and status and at providing a strong case for land reform that would end women's marginalization.

The IFAD Southern and Eastern Africa Division developed a set of guidelines to better address land tenure security in the projects and programmes it supports.

58. Project initiatives included a programme for women's rights in the land reform process in Kyrgyzstan, supported by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), which led to amendments to the Law on Agricultural Land Management. The programme strengthened rural women's right to ownership and inheritance of land and empowered them to claim their right to land and other agricultural assets, thereby bringing effective changes in the livelihoods of rural families.

59. Some attention was given to the special needs of families of migrants. Mexico proposed assigning land ownership to women whose parents, spouses or children migrated in order to secure their access to credit.

G. Improving rural women's access to information and communications technology

60. The importance of ICT was recognized in resolution 60/138, in which the Assembly called for the identification of best practices for ensuring that rural women had access to and full participation in the area of ICT. Member States and United Nations entities supported projects to bridge the digital divide and strengthen access to and benefits from ICT for women living in rural areas, in order to facilitate their empowerment and enable them to play a more active role in the economic and social development of their communities. A number of promising practices were identified, including in respect of training, improved access to communal ICT facilities or the establishment of specific facilities for women, and support for rural women's use of ICT for income generation and employment creation.

61. The provision of training was a major strategy for increasing access to and benefits of ICT for rural women. With the support of the Government, the German Women in Rural Areas Association trained women from rural areas to serve as multipliers and to support other women in rural areas in using new technologies for the direct marketing of agricultural products and services. In Uzbekistan, a UNDP-supported project to improve access to ICT provided training to women, including those with disabilities, and resulted in the creation of more than 250 personal web pages.

62. In recognition of the constraints faced by women and girls in having access to communal ICT facilities, a number of United Nations entities established centres targeted specifically at women or ensured access for women to other community centres. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU), in partnership with Member States, supported the establishment of women-led multi-purpose community telecentres in rural and remote locations in Benin, Guinea-Bissau, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia. Those centres provided access to ICT infrastructure and empowered women to play a more active role in the development of their communities. Through this project, women were able to communicate outside their local communities for social or business purposes. In addition to ICT access, the telecentres provided a number of services, including ICT training, e-mail services, word-processing, photocopying and binding. A number of other services have also developed around the telecentres, such as grocery stores, restaurants and tailoring marts, which address specific needs of rural women and their communities.

These activities were expected to improve access to microfinance and opportunities for income generation for the community at large. In partnership with UNIFEM, ITU also supported the establishment of a multimedia ICT centre for handicapped women in Senegal.

63. In Jordan, UNIFEM initiated the "e-village" programme, which consists of centres that provide villagers, women in particular, with opportunities to develop new skills, including the first-ever local community radio station, a film club, an Intel computer clubhouse, a Lego robotics lab, a Microsoft information technology (IT) academy, a printing and packaging centre and a café. UNESCO promoted the concept of community radios and community multimedia centres as a practical way to enable rural communities, including women, to use ICT and media for their own needs, as listeners, producers, managers, decision-makers and representatives of their communities. community multimedia centres combine traditional local media, such as radio, TV and newspapers, with new technologies, such as computers, Internet, CDs, mobile phones, cameras and audio recorders. To date, UNESCO has supported over 130 such centres in more than 25 countries in Africa, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean.

64. Women's access to existing community ICT centres was also supported. In Jordan, more than 50 per cent of the users of 125 ICT community centres supported by UNDP were rural women. In addition to building IT skills, the centres provide access to credit and legal advice and support income-generating projects.

65. A number of initiatives focused on the income-generating and employment creation potentials of ICT. In collaboration with strategic partners — the Asian Development Bank, ITU, the Asian Pacific Women's Information Network Centre and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Women's E-biz Centre — The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific organized a workshop on entrepreneurship and e-business development for women in the Republic of Korea in 2006. The meeting was aimed at empowering women in rural communities through the promotion of women's entrepreneurship and the use of ICT. It also provided the opportunity for participants to learn about building businesses, entrepreneurial skills and technology and tools for e-business, as well as to develop business plans. An IFAD-supported project in Latin America and the Caribbean helped rural women to sell their products over the Internet. A website provided news and information to help start small businesses and provided useful links for rural microentrepreneurs.

IV. Efforts of the United Nations system to support the empowerment of rural women and meet their specific needs

66. In its resolution 60/138 the General Assembly invited the relevant organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, in particular those dealing with issues of development, to address and support the empowerment of rural women and their specific needs in their programmes and strategies, including in the context of globalization. In addition to the measures reported on in preceding sections of the present report, United Nations entities have undertaken a variety of other measures to ensure that the different needs, priorities and contributions of women and men in rural areas are taken fully into account in all areas of work. The

present section provides some examples of initiatives undertaken by the United Nations system.

67. Some entities ensured that the situation of rural women was given explicit attention in their gender equality policies and plans. The FAO Gender and Development Plan of Action (2008-2013), for example, seeks to advance rural women's social and economic status and reduce rural women's and men's vulnerability. The Plan directly supports the Millennium Development Goals and integrates gender equality issues into work related to disaster-related and complex emergencies, bio-energy and climate change, globalization and human, animal and plant diseases.

68. Efforts were also made to ensure that attention was given to rural women in interventions in all policy areas through the gender mainstreaming strategy. Since 2003 the World Bank has implemented a Rural Development Strategy, aimed at integrating a gender perspective into all aspects of rural development as a cross-cutting issue. The Gender and Rural Development Group brings together specialists in many fields to promote the systematic integration of gender concerns in the World Bank's rural activities, consistent with the Bank's "Integrating gender into the World Bank's work: a strategy for action". The World Bank also developed a toolkit for the monitoring and evaluation of rural development projects and guidelines on mainstreaming a gender perspective throughout the project cycle.

69. As part of its overall strategy to mainstream age, gender and diversity considerations in its policies, programmes and operations, so that all beneficiaries, including those in rural areas, can benefit equally from all activities, UNHCR developed an "Accountability framework for age, gender and diversity mainstreaming", which is being rolled out in 86 country operations. The framework holds all senior staff accountable for promoting and supporting individual documentation for refugee women; ensuring a 50 per cent participation of women in refugee committees; and setting up mechanisms for follow-up and treatment of survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

70. The research and publications of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) have regularly addressed the situation of rural women in the context of agricultural and rural development. Recent research on free-trade agreement negotiations analysed the expected consequences for women agricultural workers. All available statistics and indicators collected by ECLAC have been disaggregated by sex and by region (urban and rural).

71. A number of training tools have been developed to support capacity-building for identifying and addressing the situation of rural women. Through the Socio-economic and Gender Analysis Programme, FAO developed a gender training programme for policymakers and development specialists. The Programme has assisted over 20 countries in developing gender-sensitive national action plans for the agricultural and rural sector. Approximately 4,000 development specialists in over 80 countries have been trained with the socio-economic and gender analysis methodology to integrate gender equality issues in the formulation and implementation of development programmes and projects. The World Bank developed a web-based learning module to provide basic information on gender equality issues in agriculture.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

72. **A wide range of strategies and activities were reported by Member States and United Nations entities in efforts to improve the situation of rural women and support their empowerment, in response to resolution 60/138. Significant efforts were made to support an enabling environment through attention to rural women in gender equality policies and strategies, as well as through specific policies and strategies on rural women and gender equality policies explicitly focused on rural development. Legislative change, targeted activities for rural women, information activities and work on gender statistics also contributed to creating an enabling environment for improving the situation of rural women.**

73. **Considerable efforts were made to integrate the concerns of rural women into policies, strategies, legislation and programmes. However, little information was available on the extent to which women in rural areas were able to participate and influence the design and implementation of such measures. Efforts were made to increase the participation of women in decision-making by supporting their involvement in local-level elections, including through training. Only limited information was available on the impact of these efforts.**

74. **In order to meet the basic needs of rural women, actions were taken to increase social security systems, improve their access to infrastructure and services such as water, energy, transport, education and health care, and address their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and trafficking. Little information was available on the impact of the interventions.**

75. **Given the importance of rural women's right to land and other property for their empowerment, few examples were available on the abolishment of discriminatory laws and practices. The importance of women's access to ICT has been widely recognized, and good-practice examples of activities undertaken by United Nations entities were identified.**

76. **It is critical to increase the visibility and recognition of women's contributions to the social, economic and political development of rural areas. Greater attention should be given to the situation of rural women in policies and programmes focused specifically on gender equality and those focused on rural development.**

77. **Multidimensional approaches that address the complexity of the constraints faced by rural women appear to be more effective than those that are narrowly focused on single issues.**

78. **Training and capacity-building for rural women remain important strategies for their empowerment. Awareness-raising and training on the situation of rural women is, however, also required for policymakers, community leaders and staff in key institutions at different levels, including men as well as women.**

79. **The lack of sex-disaggregated data remains a serious constraint to assessing progress. In addition, monitoring and evaluation methods that combine adequate qualitative indicators with more traditional quantitative**

measures need to be developed to strengthen the assessment of the impact of development programmes and projects on rural women.

80. **Governments, United Nations entities and all other relevant stakeholders should support legislation, policies and programmes that strengthen gender equality and the empowerment of women in rural areas. Such measures must build on the framework provided by the Beijing Platform for Action and its follow-up, as well as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Specific interventions might include:**

(a) **Ensuring systematic attention to rural women's needs, priorities and contributions in all gender equality policies and action plans, and in rural development policies and programmes, poverty reduction strategies and macroeconomic policies;**

(b) **Promoting consultation with and participation of rural women, including indigenous women, through their organizations and networks, in the design, development and implementation of gender equality and rural development interventions;**

(c) **Integrating increased employment opportunities for rural women into all international and national development strategies and poverty eradication strategies, including by expanding non-agricultural employment opportunities, improving working conditions and increasing access to productive resources;**

(d) **Accelerating the availability of, access to and use of infrastructure, such as energy, transport, water and sanitation, labour-saving technologies and services, such as education and health care;**

(e) **Ensuring increased access to and benefits from ICT for rural women, including in the area of income generation and employment opportunities;**

(f) **Increasing capacity for analysing and addressing the situation of rural women, including through training programmes and the development and dissemination of methodologies and tools;**

(g) **Improving the assessment of the impact of policies and programmes for the benefit of women in rural areas, including through the systematic collection of sex-disaggregated quantitative and qualitative data.**